

MURRIETA'S LEAP

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from the novel by John Selby

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FADE IN:

EXT. CALIFORNIA WILDERNESS, 1852 - DAY

In a pristine oak forest and beautiful springtime meadow, a solitary DEER is grazing in deep grass. Suddenly the deer raises its head, on the alert -

Off in the woods there is slight movement. An old CHUMASH INDIAN is poised with bow taut, ready to release his arrow at the deer.

The NOISE of pounding horse hooves, rattling harnesses and men shouting jolts the silence. The deer bolts for cover. The Indian turns his arrow toward the intruding sounds.

EXT. NEARBY DIRT ROAD [CONTINUOUS]

Down by the ocean beach, a fast-moving over-loaded WAGON with four horses and a DRIVER comes rolling into view, followed by four US SOLDIERS on their Cavalry horses.

They pass near the old Indian without noticing him.

EXT. ROUGH-HEWN INN - DAY

The wagon and mounted guards halt in front of a stop-over building with a corral holding fresh horses.

A young woman named JUANITA (good-looking, long dark hair, maybe with some Indian blood) greets the driver. Everyone except a Cavalry guard goes into the inn.

INT. INN [CONTINUOUS]

As the driver and soldiers enter the room, six HIGHWAYMEN leap out with pistols. One of them, JUAQUIN MURRIETA (tall, gaunt, worthy of respect, Spanish/Chumash heritage) gives orders:

MURRIETA
Arriba los manos!

He stops one of his men from roughing up the driver.

DRIVER
(to Murrieta)
Hey, you're a dead man, doing this.
We've got cavalry all over here.
California's American territory now.

MURRIETA
 (calm, bitter)
 Not for me.

DRIVER
 (demanding)
 Who are you, don't I know you?

Murrieta smiles.

MURRIETA
 My name is Juaquin, Juaquin Murrieta.

The Driver reacts.

DRIVER
 Bull - they got that renegade's head
 in a jar up in Sacramento, everybody
 knows that.

MURRIETA
 So what you think I am, a ghost?

The driver takes a folded WANTED poster out of his pocket and looks at it - no question, the man in front of him is the same. The driver tenses - afraid.

DRIVER
 Hey - but you're dead.

Murrieta reaches out, pushes the man's face half-playfully, but with an edge of anger.

MURRIETA
 That's where you're wrong, amigo.

Someone SHOUTS outside. Murrieta and two of his men go running out.

EXT. COACH STOP [CONTINUOUS]

One of Murrieta's men is busy filling several saddle bags with GOLD COINS from the coach strongbox.

In the distance up the coast, about 20 US CAVALRYMEN can be seen running their horses toward the coach stop.

Murrieta sees them - jumps on his horse, gives a curt impatient order. His men forget the rest of the gold, run to get on their horses.

Juanita comes running outside.

MURRIETA
 Juanita, quick - jump on.

She jumps up behind him on his horse. He sees a small chest on the wagon and reaches to grab it.

MURRIETA (cont'd)
 (to Juanita)
 Can you hold onto this and me at the same time?

JUANITA
 Si pues!

They take off on a run into the oak forest.

EXT. OAK FOREST - DAY

As Murrieta and his gang ride fast through the woods, they come upon the old Indian standing quietly by the trail.

Murrieta pulls his horse to a stop - and says something to the Indian in Chumash. Juanita hands the Indian the small heavy chest. Then they ride on.

EXT. A BEAUTIFUL LITTLE VALLEY - DAY

Murrieta and his small gang come riding fast past a stream, and up to a primitive rancho. The old adobe HACIENDA sits near a giant distinctive OAK TREE.

A part Spanish/part Indian RANCHER comes out of the house, followed by his wife and young child. Murrieta says something in Spanish to him, and hands him some gold coins - then gallops up the canyon behind the rancho, with Juanita still riding behind him on the horse.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SAME RANCH - DAY

A short time later, the Cavalrymen come riding fast up to the hacienda. They fire a shot and the rancher comes out from the house.

CAVALRY LEADER
 Where'd they go?

RANCHER
 (shrugs his shoulders)
 Lastima - no puedo hablar Ingle.

A translator speaks up in Spanish, and the rancher shrugs his shoulders again, points in the wrong direction.

The scout is pointing in the right direction. The cavalry leader makes a face - raises his gun and waves at the house and barns.

CAVALRY LEADER
(to his men)
Arrest him - and torch the place.

Most of the cavalrymen take off on a run after the outlaws. Four stay behind to destroy the rancho.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. UP THE CANYON - DAY

Murrieta, Juanita and his men go splashing through a stream. One man knows the territory and leads them through a tricky opening in the rocks.

Down in the distance below, the Cavalrymen are seen running their horses uphill.

As Murrieta's gang ride off into the wilderness up the stream, the IMAGE FREEZES ... into an illustration in a history book.

INT. OJAI HIGH SCHOOL, CLASSROOM - PRESENT MOMENT

The book closes - the title is "The Life and Legend of Juakin Murrieta".

Teenagers hurry out of class - all except a country-looking teenager, BENNY SCOPE (16, handsome, intelligent, rugged). He remains sitting, staring at the cover of the book he just closed.

A solitary graceful girl, LUCY (16) stands in the doorway, pretending to be searching for something in her purse, but furtively glancing at Benny.

He looks vaguely around the room, lost in inner thoughts - and fails to even register Lucy's presence.

Struck by his unseeing stare, Lucy walks quickly away. Benny again looks dreamily at his history book.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. SANTA BARBARA BANK - DAY

Outside a snazzy downtown bank, tourists in bright casual clothes are everywhere, talking and gawking.

A lone man in his thirties, JACKO MURRIETA (played by the same man who played Juaquin Murrieta in earlier scenes but with different posture and expression) comes walking through the tourist crowd, a day pack on his back.

Jacko pauses outside the bank, desperation mixed with fear dominating his expression. He remembers something -

BEGIN FLASHBACK

In a hospital a few days earlier, a sick middle-aged Latino woman, AUGUSTA MURRIETA, is sitting in a wheelchair. Her son Jacko is standing alongside her, looking hopeless.

A young woman, Jacko's cousin CHRISTINA, is with them. Jacko looks to Christina - and their eyes lock on each other.

CHRISTINA
(quietly to Jacko)
We must do it.

Jacko just nods.

END FLASHBACK

Pushed by the memory, looking determined and tough now, Jacko pulls a stocking mask over his head, takes out a pistol - and enters the bank.

EXT. OJAI HIGH SCHOOL - DAY

Same time, outside the Spanish-arch entrance of the Ojai school, loud laughing STUDENTS come bursting from the building. The school gardens are in full Springtime blossom.

A dozen students are hanging out near the parking lot, chatting, goofing around. The mood is laid-back, youthfully jubilant. A girl spreads her arms wide in Christ-imitation - some kids laugh, some scowl at her irreverence.

Benny comes walking by - he looks friendly, well-liked, bright-eyed but somehow distant from the teen scene.

As he heads for the parking lot, Lucy comes and walks along with him toward his old pickup. With a subtle sexy flair, she risks embarrassment to speak.

LUCY
Uhm - hi Benny.

BENNY
(equally shy)
Lucy, what's up?

INT. BANK - DAY [CONTINUOUS]

As V.O. from the previous scene continues, we SEE Jacko hesitate inside the door of the bank. Then he musters his nerve, walks toward the customers standing in line -

LUCY (V.O.)
So your dad has you doing ranch-work
all vacation like usual?

BENNY (V.O.)
Not this Easter - it's all mine.

In the bank, customers turn - gape at the masked robber.

Jacko looks at one of the tellers and locks eyes with her - it's his cousin Christina.

Just then a customer makes a move to escape the situation. Jacko lunges impulsively at the man, hits him with the pistol. Christina reacts to his violent flair with a gasp.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT [CONTINUOUS]

Benny and Lucy continue their shy-romance conversation.

LUCY
Well maybe we could go someplace this
week, do something, you know.

BENNY
Good idea but I'll be gone.

LUCY
Gone - where to?

Benny's eyes light up. He looks into the far distance where the Topa Topa wilderness area looms high above the valley.

BENNY
Heading way up there - hunting.

LUCY
Hunting what?

EXT. BENNY'S PICKUP [CONTINUOUS]

Standing quietly beside Benny's pickup is the old Indian, watching Benny talking to Lucy. People walk by the Indian but no one sees him at all.

Benny pauses at the pickup.

BENNY (V.O.)

Oh - hunting a buck maybe. And just finally see what's up there, way behind the ranch.

LUCY

Just you and your dad going up?

BENNY

Uhm, nope - I'm going solo.

A FRIEND of Benny's who's been listening in on the conversation pipes up, half-joking, half-chiding -

FRIEND

Benny's going to prove to his dad he's a genuine Indian, bag him a deer like a real Chumash with the native bow and arrow.

LUCY

So - what's wrong with a gun?

INT. BANK - DAY

As V.O. continues, we SEE Jacko in extreme emotions, holding his pistol on a terrorized bank manager who is stuffing Jacko's day pack with bundles of hundred-dollar bills. Christina stands watching, mute.

BENNY (V.O.)

I just prefer a bow rather than a gun - the old way.

Christina in the bank now has her hand over her mouth to suppress a scream - Jacko is very threatening as he pushes everyone in the bank into a corner.

LUCY (V.O.)

But you can't miss the party over at Roger's on Good Friday. I was thinking, you and I - I thought you were - we were ...

BENNY (V.O.)
 This hunt, it's a promise I made to
 my Gramps, to carry on with, with
 something. Listen, you know how I
 like you - but I gotta go pack.

EXT. HIGH SCHOOL PARKING LOT [CONTINUOUS]

Benny gets into his pickup. The old Indian is no longer
 there. Lucy walks right up to his window.

LUCY
 So - you're afraid.

BENNY
 Not.

LUCY
 Then you just don't like me.

BENNY
 (honest - warm)
 Wrong again.

She holds his eyes one last moment.

LUCY
 Ah, Benny, you're always running.
 Pretty soon, look out - I'm going to
 give up on you. Last warning.

She reaches, touches his arm lightly - then turns and walks
 off resolutely.

Benny almost shouts something to her - but doesn't. He
 starts his engine, drives fast out of the parking lot.

We see the old Indian riding with calm expression in the
 back of the pickup - although no one else seems to see him.

EXT. LOCAL INTERSECTION [CONTINUOUS]

Benny pulls onto the street - just as a beat-up old
 convertible Chevrolet comes too fast through a stop sign and
 nearly hits him.

Benny shouts and honks his horn at the driver - then
 recognizes her. She's a local non-glamorous beauty, FLURA
 SPARKS (played by the same woman who played Juanita in the
 early scenes - 20, wild dark hair).

When she sees who's honking at her, her expression changes, softens a moment - she smiles, waves to Benny.

Lucy is standing at a distance. She sees this unspoken exchange of friendly recognition between Benny and Flura.

From her point of view, the old Indian is not in the back of the pickup.

Benny hears cars honking behind him. Flura waves with her hand for him to go first - he drives off.

Flura drives through the intersection, then stops her car beside Lucy.

FLURA

Hey Lucy, want a ride home?

Lucy hesitates - gets in.

EXT. OJAI ARCADE - DAY

Flura and Lucy cruise through the quaint downtown arcade, enjoying the moment.

FLURA

Ah, a bit'a peace, just like the old days.

LUCY

Old days?

FLURA

Well - before this.

She holds up her left hand with a wedding ring.

FLURA (cont'd)

One thing not to do - get married right out of high school.

LUCY

You went to junior college in Ventura for a while.

FLURA

One year. That was good too. Then you know, along came the great singer - end of story. I don't want to talk about it.

EXT. OJAI SUBURBAN ROAD - DAY

Flura and Lucy ride in silence a few moments, eyeing each other uncertainly.

FLURA

Benny, he your beau?

LUCY

Oh - I wish. Him and his dad, they're not exactly the social type.

FLURA

Benny's one solid young man, I've known him since he was real little. I still go clean their house.

LUCY

I wish he'd grow up just a bit.

FLURA

It knocked him flat, his momma dying. (beat) But hey, you're looking real pretty - driving the boys wild?

LUCY

(bashful)

Hardly. Besides, I'm not one tenth as beautiful, Flura, as you.

FLURA

(disdainful)

And look where looks got me - zero.

Lucy glances at her with concern.

LUCY

You doing okay these days? I hardly see you anymore, even though we're neighbors.

Flura makes a slight deflated scowl.

FLURA

Oh - gettin' by.

Lucy hesitates - then speaks up with concern.

LUCY

We can't help but hearing. It's not right, Rickie doing that to you. My dad almost called the cops last time.

FLURA

(reacting)

You tell him, mind his own business.
Rickie and me, we do fine - except
when he's drinking.

LUCY

Could I help - any way?

FLURA

No, no.

They become silent.

INT. BANK IN SANTA BARBARA - DAY

Jacko has everybody on the floor. Someone walks in and he uses his pistol menacingly to get this person down too. Then with a full backpack, he takes off outside, removing his mask - cutting down a side street.

EXT. COUNTRYSIDE NEAR OJAI - DAY

Benny comes driving along in his pickup past open hay fields and orange groves. It's a beautiful spring day - magnificent visuals. We see the old Indian in the back again, smiling as he watches the beauty of the countryside go by.

Benny passes a big man-made LAKE (Lake Casitas) and then makes a right turn and heads up a private ranch road.

Alongside the private drive in a big field, Benny sees his father FRANK out plowing, driving a D6 bulldozer. Benny waves - his father waves back.

Over a small hill at the end of the road, Benny drives up to an old wooden ranch house with barns and corrals (they've been built beside that same stream and ancient oak tree we saw earlier, where the old-time hacienda and its barns once stood).

Pulling up to the barn, as Benny gets out the old Indian jumps out as well - but Benny doesn't see the Indian at all.

EXT. OJAI SUBURBS - DAY

Flura and Lucy come driving through a somewhat run-down part of town. They pull into a driveway beside a beat-up 2-ton truck. Flura reacts to the truck with sudden anxiety.

FLURA
Oh no - he's back, already.

LUCY
You can come over to my house.

FLURA
You're sweet - but this is something
I gotta deal with myself.

Flura forces herself to get out with her bag of groceries.
She walks toward the house. Lucy gets out, turns,
concerned - watches Flura disappear into the house.

INT. SMALL HOUSE [CONTINUOUS]

It's dark inside, curtains closed. Flura walks through the
living room, increasingly afraid - hurries into the kitchen.

INT. KITCHEN

FLURA is bending to put vegetables in the refrigerator.

Suddenly she's grabbed from the rear. Her husband RICK - big
and handsome but drunk and drugged - grabs her sexually.

She struggles out of his grip, backs off from him.

FLURA
What are you doing, back a day early?
I thought you had to go all the way -

RICK
(accusing)
Where you been - who you been with?

FLURA
Nobody, you know that.

RICK
(ugly tone)
Come here, I want ya.

FLURA
You're stoned - leave me be.

She backs away, runs from the room. He follows.